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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the issues raised in a recent review of postcompulsory education and training in Victoria. In the interim report (April 2000) it is stated that employers found that the skills of new graduates appear to be most deficient in the areas of creativity, flair, problem solving, oral business communication, and interpersonal skills. It is upon the first three of these perceived deficiencies that this paper focuses. In a research study conducted in southern New South Wales primary schools (Bottrell 1997-1999) where 85 teachers were surveyed, it was found that the subjects of creative arts and science are being allocated significantly less time in the curriculum of primary schools than other so-called basic subjects. With the government policy driven emphasis on literacy and numeracy, competency based approaches to curriculum, standardized testing programs and outcomes based curriculum, subjects which are likely to promote flair, creativity and problem solving often slip into the background. Competency based and outcomes based curriculum develops in learners an imperative to emit the desired response to achieve the stated outcome, thus encouraging homogeneity of response and convergent outcomes. Teachers faced with the need to prepare students for standardized statewide tests which result, despite assurances to the contrary, in league tables of successful educational institutions, are tempted to teach to the test and to narrowly defined competencies or outcomes. Thus, from both a teaching and a learning perspective, the likelihood of flair, creativity and problem solving being encouraged is severely diminished. (Contains 34 references.) (Author/RS)

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The Future: Optimism or Ossification.

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ABSTRACT

The future: Optimism or Ossification

This paper addresses the issues raised in a recent review of post compulsory education and training in Victoria. In the interim report (April 2000) it is stated that employers found that the skills of new graduates appear to be most deficient in the areas of creativity, flair, problem solving, oral business communication and interpersonal skills. It is upon the first three of these perceived deficiencies that this paper focuses. In a research study conducted in southern NSW primary schools (Bottrell 1997-1999) where 85 teachers were surveyed, it was found that the subjects of creative arts and science are being allocated significantly less time in the curriculum of primary schools than other so-called basic subjects. With the government policy driven emphasis on literacy and numeracy, competency based approaches to curriculum, standardised testing programs and outcomes based curriculum, subjects which are likely to promote flair, creativity and problem solving often slip into the background. Competency based and outcomes based curriculum develops in learners an imperative to emit the desired response to achieve the stated outcome, thus encouraging homogeneity of response and convergent outcomes. Teachers faced with the need to prepare students for standardised statewide tests which result, despite assurances to the contrary, in league tables of successful educational institutions, are tempted to teach to the test and to narrowly defined competencies or outcomes. Thus from both a teaching and a learning perspective the likelihood of flair, creativity and problem solving being encouraged is severely diminished

KEY WORDS: Optimism; creativity

In the interim report (April 2000:7) of the Ministerial Review of Post-Compulsory Schooling Training Pathways it was stated that employers found that the skills of new graduates appear to be most deficient in the areas of 'creativity and flair, problem solving skills, oral business communication skills and interpersonal skills'. However, in the final report of the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria(August 2000), there is a less definitive and more sanitised version of this criticism. The report seems to have taken the 'party line' that literacy and numeracy skills are paramount and once again the so-called soft subjects have been neglected. With the government policy driven emphasis on literacy and numeracy, competency based approaches to curriculum, standardised testing programs and outcomes based curriculum, subjects which are likely to promote flair, creativity and problem solving often slip into the background. Competency based and outcomes based curriculum develops in learners an imperative to emit the desired response to achieve the stated outcome, thus encouraging homogeneity of response and convergent outcomes.

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Teachers faced with the need to prepare students for standardised statewide tests which result, despite assurances to the contrary, in league tables of successful educational institutions, are tempted to teach to the test and to narrowly defined competencies or outcomes. Thus from both a teaching and a learning perspective the likelihood of flair, creativity and problem solving being encouraged is severely diminished. Subjects such as the Arts, which are associated with these skills and attributes, are relegated to the margins of the curriculum, and are often perceived as frills which can be done without. This devaluing of skills, knowledge and understandings conjoint to subject areas such as Visual Art, Music, Drama and Dance is not purely a contemporary phenomena and has been documented in Ministerial reports over the last thirty-five years (Coulter 1995). However, defining the skills which the citizen of the future will need is a complex exercise despite simplistic efforts of educational policy makers to do so.

When we ponder the skills which may be needed to make Australia, or any other nation, competitive in the new millennium, we are faced with the dilemma of being unable to forecast what skills and competencies will be needed in the future. We are barely able to define what skills are needed in the present era of late modernity, let alone in any future era. It is for this reason, that any curriculum which is competency based or which employs standardised tests as a means to assure quality, can only be a curriculum for the past and the present. It can never be a curriculum for the future. In order to gain some perspective on the complex nature of the current context of education and schooling, the broad social, political and economic context within which such systems operate will be explored here.

The present era, which is variously labelled Late or High modernity, Post Fordism, Post Modernism, Post Capitalism, Disorganised Capitalism, Post Traditional, to list but a few of the many variations on a theme, is characterised by certain commonly agreed features. The label one attaches to this era reflects a particular ideological or philosophical perspective, but the features which are defined according to any of the labels, are common. Such common features include: globalisation; mobilisation of marginalised 'others' leading to the rise of New Social Movements; new social discourses; rapid technological change; the breaking and blurring of traditional boundaries between nations and people; the change in the role of the nation state; the rise of powerful multinational corporations; the prevailing economic neo-liberal ideology of economic rationalism with the resultant strategies of micro-economic reform; the rise of abstract and expert systems; and the development of multiple literacies and knowledges.

Each of these features is underpinned by complex concepts and warrants discussion in its own right. However, for the purposes of this paper, they are used as a backdrop and context for a discussion of the place of the more marginalised discipline areas such as Visual Art, Music and more recently, Science in the curriculum of schooling in a post-traditional era where economic rationalism and corporate managerialism are the dominant discourses.

Economic rationalism is based upon values such as: competition; market forces; increased productivity; credentialism; competencies and quality assurance; multiskilling; focus on product and outcomes; instrumentalist approach to education; disappearance of the working class and manual tasks; corporate management approaches. In addressing the concept of managerialism and its emphasis on generic management and system structures, such as the competency movement as applied to education and training, Pusey (1991) claims

> Models and model building [such as competencies] are really the microtechnologies that rationalising managerialism uses to turn arbitrariness into 'givenness' and actuality. They disempower reflection, they sterilise whatever is left of action-orienting traditions, and they irreversibly change the politics of reform by making system structures opaque. In short, they uncouple culture from system, make the former contingent upon the latter, and redraw the boundary between the two (p178).

Under the dominant discourse of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism education and training are reduced to commodities to be consumed, made obsolete and reconsumed. Education and training are seen as products which the clients will choose to buy, consume and spend. This is akin to the 'Banking' model of education about which Friere (1972) wrote is his Pedagogy of the Oppressed where he described the kind of mechanistic and disempowering system of education which fails to liberate and emancipate people from potential or actual oppression or from external control. A system of education which is founded upon economic rationalism where all the elements of the system are 'downsized' at the same time as they are exhorted to produce 'more with less' is bound to be reductionist and mechanistic. In such a climate, key learning areas such as Science, SOSE/HSIE and the Arts are under threat.

The curriculum as an arrangement of elements in a system reflects the looming logic of rationalist organisational principles. Nationalism is interconnected with economic rationalism in that it is very much the concern of government (Weate 1994:34). The national curriculum may be seen as part of the Australian desire to become a first world class state. A national effort to unify the schooling of the country's children under one curriculum, had been seen by the Australian Education Council as an imperative in

response to micro economic policy, partly to make use of scarce resources and also to minimise differences between education systems of the States and Territories . In the 1980's and 1990's the Commonwealth provided the macro-level policy directives and initiatives, and it was here that the Commonwealth exerted some jurisdiction over the states and territories in the form of specific grants and programs. Through these grants, 'national initiatives' have been promoted. McFarlane (1994:23) pointed out that many of the States and Territories had formulated models based on the national framework, but the 'stated use varies quite considerably'. The titles of the State and Territory curriculum policy documents are diverse and it appears that the State and Territory Ministers are asserting their rights and working within national boundaries to develop terminology and content they consider to be of relevance to their state.

Not only do the States and Territories appear to have exerted their independence in educational decision making, but the sense of educational and philosophical priorities of individual teachers and combined staff, are perceived by teachers as factors contributing to the way in which teachers present the curriculum. Factors such as the apparent variety in the implementation of mandatory curriculum documents by teachers (Scott 1994), some principals appearing to give vast amounts of freedom to teachers in their day to day teaching (Cresswell and Fisher 1995; Bottrell 2000) and the absence of national testing in areas of the curriculum other than literacy and numeracy fly in the face of accountability and sameness which are indicative of economic rationalism. The implementation of primary curriculum will continue to be characterised by 'hybridisation', and as Regan (1998:173) states this may, or may not be a desirable thing.

Although primary curriculum may be open to forms of hybridisation there are trends beginning to emerge that demonstrate conformity. Bottrell's (2000) study, which involved questionnaire responses from fifty southern NSW DET primary schools as well as fifteen interviews, found that teachers allocate major time to English and maths within their timetable. In analysis of the timetables of teachers from the fifty schools, combined English and maths represented more than two thirds of the timetabled teaching time. The arts and PD/H/PE were allocated slightly more than 11% of timetabled teaching time, with HSIE and Science Technology around 6% each. These findings reflect the pattern of results from previous studies conducted in various States and Territories in Australia, which indicate that large portions of the timetable are taken up by the subjects of English and maths and other subjects such as science, arts and HSIE are consequently allocated a reduced portion of the timetable (R-7 Report, 1981; Mauragis, 1993; Hill et al 1999).

One possible explanation for the inadequate coverage of subjects from the arts KLA in primary schools may be the lack of confidence some teachers demonstrate in these areas (Berliner et al, 1988 & 1992; Scott 1994; Bottrell, 2000). Barnes (1989) defined the concept of 'insider mysticism' related to the complexity of content and to tne difficulty involved in understanding some artistic values contained in policy documents, even at the primary level. At the primary level, and at times more often in the secondary, as pressure on an overcrowded curriculum is increased it becomes more difficult for teachers of subjects such as Art, to assert the value of that particular subject. Teachers choose to teach subjects such as Art because they believe that Art has intrinsic value in the education of students. However, it is difficult to convince the executive of a school unless a teacher can articulate clearly why time is an important factor and how time is used in teaching Art: Richard Siegesmund (1998) suggests

> In the gap which exists between the valuing of art education and the time given to it in the curriculum, art education dissipates. Consequently, art educators, who must fight to maintain their discipline's presence in the curriculum, are continually returning to the question of why do we teach art? (1998:197)

Currently education in the arts is being influenced by external, governmental modes of thought which are a narrow representation of society, rather than being driven by the intrinsic values of the various arts subjects. This reductionist agenda has been interpreted by policy makers as legitimating their actions and policies which conglomorate arts subjects together in the one KLA. Livermore (1993:7) described the Arts KLA as a 'collection of separate subjects' and suggested that 'the bundling together of these discrete areas of knowledge' would have repercussions, and, the 'long term effects of these decisions are yet to be felt.' In the last five years, issues related to timetabling, outcomes, assessment have begun to surface, and meaningful studies of situations pertaining to art subjects, time, teachers and learners in schools are needed in order to provide solid data on which to base informed decisions about the direction of arts and their role within education.

Two national inquiries have been conducted concerning Art Education in Australia: The first in 1977 and the second in 1985. Both inquiries resulted in reports which highlight a need for more time to be allocated in the curriculum for the Arts. The 1977 report recommended that the Arts should be allotted 20% of the timetable space in primary school and the first two years of secondary school.

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The 1985 inquiry pointed out that little had been achieved since the 1977 report. Many of the issues raised in 1977 and again in the 1985 report were not acted upon (1985:15). The 1995 Senate Report into the Arts also commented on the lack of change. Further, it was critical of the state of Art education, particularly in primary schools

> The general quality of primary teaching in the arts has been described as unsatisfactory. There is no doubt that there are many primary teachers interested and well qualified to teach aspects of the arts. However, it is our impression that the majority of primary teachers are ill equipped by their preservice training to teach the arts and because of their own limited or negligible experience of the arts, lack confidence to do so. The difficulty is compounded by the need to provide broad experience for primary children in the visual arts, crafts, dance and movement, drama and media studies. (Report by the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee. **Arts Education** 1995:49)

Difficulties related to the teaching of more marginalised subjects originates in the foundation stages of early primary and being perpetuated in the middle school and into the post compulsory stage. At this stage teacher education must bear scrutiny. Current cuts to University funding have had universities running for cover and once more it is those areas that are marginalised that have been trimmed off to excess. Teacher education courses, in attempts to meet budget constraints have cut down on subjects such as science, drama, music and visual art to meet the perceived demand of further literacy and numeracy 'training' (Kendall, 1986; Kendall and Cummings 1994; Gibson-Quick, 1999) . The ramifications of these cuts on the comprehensiveness of education for the future remain to be seen.

Scott (1992) stated that art is being translated into measurable contributions that can be made to the value of the economy. Using her terminology of 'new practicality' the view is expressed that technical concerns currently dominate and displace subjects that do not appear to have an immediate application to employment. Art, science and the humanities are in competition with the self-styled expedience of vocational subjects. The emergence of Finn (1991), Mayer (1992) and Carmichael (1992) reports and the competencies that these reports describe put Australian education into the context of Scott's 'new practicality'.

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Teachers need to take on the challenge of creativity and turn away from the dominance of a 'teach to the test' mentality. There have been various studies which have examined how change is implemented in education (Triandis,1971; Fullan, 1991 and Hargreaves, 1994 & 1999), but little information is available on how teachers read, interpret and program the content of curriculum documents. The intensification of teachers work (Hargreaves, 1994) affects the amount of time available to teachers in which to read and interpret curriculum documents. The current situation in NSW, and Victorian schools, with the overwhelming amount of support documentation for literacy, has resulted in little time being available for teachers to critically consider draft syllabus documents for other KLAs. Educators need to be involved and informed in and about curriculum decisions, Karparti and Schonau (1998:10) have observed that when 'new ideas are transplanted into a situation where nobody is prepared, the natural reactions are suspicion, withdrawal, or obstruction'.

The challenge which is faced by all those who work and study within the education system, is to create a learning environment where participants, both as teachers and learners, are able to function creatively, independently, critically and reflectively so as to lead to the ability to work and live as empowered and liberated human beings. Economic rationalist approaches align closely with behaviourist models of teaching and learning where it is assumed that individuals will need external stimulus to which they are expected to respond before learning can occur. Such a model works from the premise that human beings are responding organisms and thus will need to be reinforced either positively or negatively to entrench desired responses and extinguish undesirable behaviours. A system which encourages a 'tick the box' mentality whereby individuals are either deemed to be 'competent or 'not competent' is based upon a belief in behaviourism as a learning theory. Such a philosophy is unlikely to provide a climate in schooling which allows subjects that are considered 'creative' to flourish. In the area of the Arts, expressive rather than behavioural objectives are favoured. Expressive objectives as described by Eisner (1972) are evocative rather than prescriptive, allow for and expect diversity rather than homogeneity of outcome and do not predetermine the product or behaviour desired. Rather, expressive objectives provide a description of the learning context and experiences through which the learners will pass, and thus do not prescribe the outcome.

Moving forward from homogeneity through diversity Eisner (1991) advocates connoisseurism which is both critical and reflective and is based on the premise that the methods, content and assumptions in arts, humanities and social sciences may help in understanding schools and classrooms. If we are to produce people able to build the 'clever country' we do not need automatons and mechanical responders to outside control. According to the OECD as quoted in Enterprising Nation - A Report by the Industry Task Force which was commissioned by the Commonwealth Government in 1995, an enterprising individual possesses the following characteristics: has a positive

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and adaptable disposition towards change; sees change as an opportunity rather than a problem; has self confidence; is at ease dealing with risk and uncertainty; has creative ideas and implements them; is motivated and takes responsibility; is an effective communicator, negotiator, planner and organiser; has ability to create value where none existed before; is able to create wealth through sound technical, business and market knowledge; builds an enterprise culture based on a set of values and beliefs which support independent, entrepreneurial behaviour. An individual who possesses these attributes is unlikely to have developed them through a behaviourist form of education or training.

In order to produce the kind of individual we are told is needed for the future, an education which focuses more on the cognitive and humanistic approaches to teaching and learning appears to be indicated. Cognitivist approaches proceed from a premise that human beings are thinking, reasoning organisms who make sense of their world and their place in it, through rational and logical thought processes. This approach requires a resource rich learning environment which stimulates the thinking and the intellect of the learner and which gives the learner control of the direction the learning process takes. In this approach the process of learning is as important, if not more important than the product whereas in behaviourist approaches, the product is the major concern. Learning approaches which proceed from a cognitivist premise would see that learners needs to be challenged to make their own meanings in a logical and rational manner rather than having meanings imposed upon them from the outside.

Humanistic approaches to teaching and learning assume that the individual is a doing, thinking, feeling organism. The affective dimension of our being is regarded by humanistic educators, as central to our ability to learn and to acquire knowledge and skills in an holistic and purposeful manner. In this paradigm, learning is seen to occur best when all of the domains, that is the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor are employed and appealed to. Teaching and learning approaches which proceed from a humanistic premise then will encourage learners and teachers to involve their own feelings, values and ethical concerns in the learning of a body of knowledge or a skill. Learners will be encouraged to self evaluate and to independently generate and construct their own knowledge and meanings. Curriculum, narrowly devised to certify people as 'competent' or 'not yet competent' does not appear to promise the kind of teaching and learning context which is required to produce the enterprising individual outlined by the OECD.

The enterprising individual is more likely to develop as a result of a combination of all three approaches to learning and teaching: that is behaviourist, cognitivist and humanistic. The mark of a skilled educator is to know how to employ all three of these approaches and, perhaps more importantly, to decide as a professional educator, when it is appropriate to employ a particular approach in order to provide the most productive learning and teaching context possible. It is also necessary that teachers and learners develop a value for difference and diversity rather than sameness and a level playing field. The concept of generic competencies reduces learning of knowledge, values and skills to a 'no name, home brand' activity where sameness is valued and where the lowest common denominator is the standard. . This approach is likely to lead to mediocrity rather than excellence.

Economic rationalist approaches to education cannot produce people who are adaptable, flexible and creative. Pusey (1991) in discussing the defects of the economic rationalist, neoclassical approaches claims

> In its constructions of time and its incapacity to read or 'obey' the external environment, economic rationalism as a model for action is the very opposite of an adaptive system. The blinding 'objectivation' of the external environment, together with the distances that have been produced by such a violent rupture between nature and culture, resemble instead of a model, a self-destroying system (p.21).

This sentiment is encouraging though initially depressing, but it does hold within it, hopes that the current economic ideology will bring about its own failure, and requires radical change and renewal. Whilst this is an ultimate light at the end of the long, painful economic rationalist tunnel, the irony is that in destroying itself, economic rationalism will also have destroyed the social and cultural fibre which is needed to reconstruct and rebuild the social, political and economic framework for renewal. We are challenged then, to work within the economic rationalist paradigm but to creatively and critically confront and overturn its reductionist, simplistic and mechanistic approaches to teaching and learning. The development of tomorrow's enterprise individual calls for creative and novel approaches to education. Such creativity as is needed can be effectively fostered through a value for the Arts and the kinds of attitudes, values, skills and knowledge which they facilitate and develop. However, Bottrell's (2000) study reveals that in the curriculum of primary schooling, Arts subjects, social sciences and science are relegated to the margins and are not afforded the same value as other more popular and trendy curriculum areas. This demonstrates the narrow and blinkered view governments have of what is needed in the citizen of tomorrow, or even of today.

Scott (1991:30) has suggested that the continued division between skill-based schooling and a general education that included the humanities, will perpetuate the structural inequalities that exist in education. The emphasis away from subjects that encourage creativity and flair, problem solving and independent thinking is becoming entrenched in all areas of compulsory schooling.

If teachers want to develop the identity and integrity that good teaching requires, educators and policy makers need to do something which may be considered to be alien in academic culture, that is to talk to each other. This is something Palmer (1997:21) says is 'risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract.' What needs to be talked about should follow prolonged observations in the learning environment, and thoughtful analysis which gives richer and deeper understanding of how learning does and can take place within policy framework.

The agenda of governments and the policies which they promulgate in the current era has been referred to as The New Right agenda. Within this New Right agenda there are two strands: neo -liberalism and neo-conservatism. Apple (1996) states that

> The main message of neoliberalism is ...a vision of the weak state. A society that lets the 'invisible hand' of the free market guide all aspects of its forms of social interaction [and] is seen as both efficient and democratic. (Apple, 1996, P.29)

The neo-conservative agenda, however, is

> guided by a vision of the strong state in certain areas, especially over the politics of the body and gender and race relations, over standards, values and conduct, and over what knowledge should be passed on to future generations (Apple, 1996, p.29)

Within the New Right movement, teachers and learners are, therefore, required to straddle two positions which are potentially in tension with each other. Neoliberalism and neoconservatism

> ...do not sit side by side in the conservative coalition. Thus the rightist movement is contradictory...(Apple, 1996, p.29)

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These two potentially conflicting strands of the New Right exert the dominant influence on public policy including that which directs education. Thus we have one strand - the conservative one - which demands a strong nation state with a contained role for the markets, heavy intervention in social and economic life and an assertion of strong state control over people's lives and work. The other strand - the liberal strand, however, asserts the need for a weak nation state where market forces are dominant and privatisation, individualism and opposition to the welfare state are central features. In the midst of this tension between the two strands of the New Right are the institutions of society including schools and universities. Thus, we see policies which privilege 'the basics' and turn literacy and numeracy into political constructs to the detriment and marginalisation of subjects such as the Arts and science which foster creativity, problem solving, flair, interpersonal skills and communication skills - those attributes found to be lacking in the recent report into post-compulsory schooling. We appear to be in an ironic situation which has been created by the very government policies which purport to be aimed at producing the 'clever country'. It has not worked, but has produced a mechanistic, basic and impoverished curriculum which sells the future generation short, and takes us back to the era of scientific management and payment by results. This approach results in ossification rather than optimism. Balance appears to be difficult to achieve when curriculum issues are in contention. It is clear, however, that unless and until there is a balance which allows for all the various realms of meaning and ways of knowing to be valued in the curriculum of schooling, we will hasten backwards rapidly, and disappear down our own black hole of curriculum.

With the recent release of the final Kirby Report (2000)strategies have been suggested to attempt to improve outcomes of schooling for young people. Particular emphasis has been placed on 'greater cross sectional integration of programs and services, and a greater capacity for systemic planning and leadership' (Ling p14). Recent meetings related to the Local Learning and Employment networks have demonstrated that there is a certain lack of communication between the traditional secondary sector and the TAFE sector. Kirby Report (2000 p21) recommendations which pertain to the links between primary and junior-secondary and post-compulsory educators, be they secondary schools, TAFE, Universities need to be addressed whilst allowing students to keep their options open for higher education as well as employment. The report maintains the argument that the needs of young people and those of the economy and an harmonious society require a more flexible and accountable post compulsory education and training system (2000p14).

There is a serious challenge then for policy makers to address the imbalances and inadequacies which are apparent in the present curriculum of schooling. Despite a rhetoric which mandates that eight KLAs be studied in Australian Schools it is clear from the studies mentioned in this paper, that scant attention is paid to several of these. Where policy construction in the education system is concerned it may be seen as a

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constantly transformative and transformed activity, drawing upon new situations and new ideological concepts for its direction. The tensions between interest groups and power groups will continue, if not escalate against a background of increased competition and demand for assessment of outcomes and quality. Increased demands by a central bureaucracy for standards of competence and accountability set the stage for conflict and lobbying between groups and individuals whose interests are at odds whose ideological and philosophical beliefs are apparently incompatible. The interplay and interaction of diverse groups and individuals will continuously make and remake the arena in which educational policy is formed. Marginalised voices which speak up for under represented and undervalued subjects are challenge to yell more loudly in the policy making arena, rather than regarding policy making as a spectator sport.

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